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Caroline Sumpter, *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), xii + 254 pages, illustrated, hardback, £50 (ISBN 978 0 230 51805 6).

The modern study of fairy tales originates, like so much else, with the Victorians, and from their day to this the tradition is unbroken, though approaches have changed with every generation. Whether opening out onto folklore on one side, or onto children's literature on the other, the study of fairy tales has always been a highly theoretical affair, tied to philological and anthropological speculation in the nineteenth century, and cycling through the familiar series of formalist, psychoanalytic, feminist, and Marxist schools in the twentieth. Self-consciously historicising, empirically grounded approaches which escape the totalising claims of theory are a more recent development, and they have been particularly successful in dealing with the nineteenth century itself. Caroline Sumpter's *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale* is a welcome addition to this growing body of literature, and its originality lies in its conscription of a method – periodical research – that has rarely been so extensively applied before. Media history and the history of reading give us unparalleled insights into the political and commercial contexts of a genre often mythologized as both timeless and archetypal and in perpetual danger of extinction. The new print media of the Victorian period, far from killing some kind of authentic oral culture, actually preserved, reinvented, and brought the fairy tale to new mass audiences. It was in the newspapers and magazines that the study of folklore was developed, that 'classical' stories were kept in circulation, and newly authored fairy tales were adapted to a variety of contemporary uses, from debates concerning race and evolution to socialist and homosexual agendas.

Sumpter begins by offering an 'alternative history' of the fairy tale, breaking with the traditional narrative of its disappearance from English popular culture in the 1600s and with the other familiar account of its retreat before the didactic educationalists of the early nineteenth century, by foregrounding its continuous presence in magazines from the eighteenth century onwards. The Romantics, and the Victorians after them, bewailed the advent of cheap newspapers, which had supposedly given the deathblow not just to the oral tale but to the chapbook which had become identified with the authentic 'literature of the people' just as it was falling out of use. But this lament for the death of folk culture was itself as dependent on the new press as the folklore revival that accompanied it. It was in the press that the reception of the Grimms took place, and it was upon the stories found in newspapers that collectors of Irish folktales from Croker to Yeats drew (even if they repudiated them in the same breath). Irish newspapers co-opted folklore for nationalist causes, and themselves became the subjects of new fairy tales in the *Dublin and London Magazine* and the *Irish Penny Magazine* of the 1820s and 30s. English magazines in the same years popularised the folklore of different European nations and the 'Indo-European thesis' of the common origin of folktales in the mythology of the 'childhood of the race'. Fairy tales were ideologically central to Dickens's *Household Words*, while periodical reviewing in *Macmillan's*, *Fraser's*, and the *Cornhill* created the textual and visual fairy tale canon, beginning with Cruikshank's illustrations for Taylor's *German Popular Stories*. Scientific as well as literary debates about the origins of folktales unfolded in the *Nineteenth Century*, the *Fortnightly Review* and the *Contemporary Review*: Max Müller propounded his philological solar thesis and Andrew Lang advanced his anthropological counterargument about savage survivals. The press did not merely record oral tradition, it shaped it (25), and it was the primary

site for debates about the meanings of fairy tales, from the literary creations of Perrault, Andersen, and Carroll, and the middle-class anthologies of Dasent and Mulock, to W. T. Stead's penny 'Books for the Bairns'.

After offering a broad overview, Sumpter moves on to her first case study, examining the use of folktale scholarship and original fairy tales in three middle-class juvenile monthlies: *Aunt Judy's Magazine* edited by the Gatty family, Charlotte Yonge's *Monthly Packet*, and George MacDonald's *Good Words for the Young*. All three magazines 'drew on recent developments in comparative philology and "savage" anthropology' (34), not just in their non-fiction articles about folklore but in the fairy tales and fantasies contributed by J. H. Ewing, Charles Kingsley, MacDonald, and others. The reason for this interest was the widespread acceptance of the theory of recapitulation, which had entered social science and literary discourse from biology, and explicitly linked the Romantic child to savages and peasants. Individual growth was held to replicate the cultural evolution of humankind: early man and the modern child were analogous in mental development. Fairy tales, therefore, whether they were cast as the debris of the mythopoeic poetry of Müller's primitive Aryans, or as Lang's savage survivals, were particularly suited to children, and the texts of the juvenile periodicals betrayed the influence of this notion at every level. Sumpter examines numerous instances of the paradigm, as well as its connections to colonial ideologies, and to class and gender politics, as manifested in the tales themselves and in the magazine illustrations. The interactive nature of the correspondence columns is also given its due, as children negotiated editorial expectations and responded to the fairy tales on offer.

The adult shilling monthlies of the 1860s, the *Cornhill* and *Macmillan's*, are the subject of Sumpter's second case study, and she evokes the importance of scientific discourse in shaping fairy tale reception with renewed force. 'Fairy-tale metaphors were often used to capture the grandeur of scientific discovery', and the 'science of Mythology' formed the foundation for reviews of folktale collections, 'Indo-European linguistic unity' underwriting the disputed worth of Gaelic stories (69-70). Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*, first serialised in *Macmillan's* in 1862-3 alongside articles by Müller, drew on these philological and ethnological notions to make its own points about racial degeneration (equating Irishmen with 'Negroes' and monkeys) and natural selection. Kingsley created a Darwinian fantasy about a poor child whose evolutionary metaphors were taken up by other contributors to the two monthlies, although Anne Thackeray Ritchie and Christina Rossetti approached the task from a different angle. For them and other female contributors, Cinderella provided a way to talk about class relations, while Sleeping Beauty offered the chance to address the Woman Question and female education.

In the shilling monthlies 'the fairy tale was used to disturb and to expose social injustice', but for 'lasting political solutions' Sumpter turns to the socialist press of the 1890s (87), in particular to John Trevor's *Labour Prophet* and Keir Hardie's *Labour Leader*, affiliated with the Labour Church movement and the Independent Labour Party respectively. In these newspapers, the allegorical application of fairy tales – already perfected by the middle-class magazines -- becomes positively overwhelming. Although a number of socialist periodicals had adopted the strategies of New Journalism, fiction was not just a 'commercial gambit' but an effective 'propaganda tool' (92). Fairy tales were indispensable as vehicles of satire and as allegories of desire, and political cartoonists adopted fairy-tale characters, situations, and images to make polemical points, to educate and convert. But there was also a deeper ideological point: ethical socialists held that self-

improvement and social change were inextricable, and this dual focus characterised both the children's columns of the *Leader* and the *Cinderella Supplement* of the *Prophet*. The Cinderella clubs, established to feed and entertain slum children and run by Labour Church, ILP, and Clarion activists, were the kind of working-class-administered philanthropic project that lent itself particularly well to fairy-tale metaphors. Fairy tales not only provided a suitable vocabulary for the utopianism of the socialist movement, they also 'equated juvenile innocence with a stage of simpler human relations, and with the fellowship ideal of a forever lost pre-industrial society' (105). The *Prophet's* correspondence classes recommended books by folklorists that advanced the recapitulation thesis, and the model of social evolution already popularised by the children's monthlies of the 1860s made its appearance again in the labour periodicals. As fairies and Nature were conscripted in the fight against industrial capitalism, the children's columns assiduously cultivated rural lore and fairy motifs. And because the anticipated social transformation was dependent upon juvenile education in socialism, didactic editorial fairies preaching socialist morality appeared side by side with retellings of traditional tales whose conservative message was left incongruously intact. Political significance in the *Cinderella Supplement* was created through context and juxtaposition (118), but in the *Leader's* 'Daddy Time' columns, indoctrination in the ILP brand of socialism was much more direct. Hardie used the columns to establish the Labour Crusaders, an organisation for young socialists closely linked to the Labour Church. The child reader was invited to become a character in the serial story of Jack's fight against the capitalist giants, to identify with the protagonist and to join her parents' real-life political crusade by participating in the allegorical fairy tale. The participation was not just metaphorical: Hardie encouraged dialogue, and child readers wrote letters and influenced editorial policy, forging a 'community of interest' in the process (127).

Sumpter's final chapter deals with another 1890s community of writers and readers, but one which could not have been more different from the working-class audiences of the labour newspapers: the producers and consumers of the little coterie magazines associated with Symbolism and Decadence, with the Celtic Revival, secret homosexual societies, and arts and crafts guilds. Sumpter covers not just the well known: Oscar Wilde's fairy tales and the *Yellow Book*, but the more obscure: the *Dome*, the *Pageant*, the *Butterfly*, the *Quest*, the *Quarto*, the *Beam*, the *Dial*, the *Century Guild Hobby Horse*, and the *Artist and Journal of Home Culture*. Fairy tales – no more aimed at children than the mid-Victorian contributions to *Macmillan's* -- were ubiquitous in these periodicals, and no one was more responsible for their proliferation than Laurence Housman, writer, illustrator, and book designer. After describing the magazines' elitist and anti-commercial pretensions and niche marketing, Sumpter examines the influence of the arts and crafts aesthetic (via Ruskin and Morris in particular) on their fairy tale illustrations. She considers the Paterian fairy-tale fantasies of Vernon Lee, the appropriation of folklore by Celtic Symbolists such as Yeats and Fiona Macleod (William Sharp), the symbolic function of fairyland, and the obsession with the child and the unsocialized adult as 'decadent emblems of individualism' (140). Aestheticist aspiration to the child's freshness of perception, Blake, Symonds, Pater, and Simeon Solomon, all came together in Housman's symbolist and sexually ambiguous stories. Sumpter concludes by tracing the contribution of Japanese sexual exoticism and the Eastern eroticism of Richard Burton's scandalous translation of the *Arabian Nights* to the 'coded gay discourse' of the little magazines' fairy tales and illustrations (156). The focus on forbidden love, gender inversion, androgyny, and Greek homoeroticism, the authors' membership of

the secret homosexual society the Order of Chaeronea, the links between the magazines and Leonard Smithers's sexually explicit fairy-tale publications, and the theorisations of J. A. Symonds and Havelock Ellis, all point to the fairy tale's continued appropriation by gay discourse even after the watershed of the Wilde trials.

In evoking the paradoxical role of the Victorian periodical as the fairy tale's perceived killer but actual preserver and innovator, Sumpter performs an invaluable service for the study of both print culture and the fairy tale mode. But the book is not without its flaws, and certain omissions result in a less comprehensive treatment than could be wished. For example, the Victorians applied the theory of recapitulation and the sciences of origins (philology, anthropology), not just to fairy tales, but to all traditional genres from epic to romance – the fairy tale was but one instance in a much broader case which continued to be made in the Reviews with respect to the romance revival of the 1880s and 90s. Similarly, the use of parable, allegory, and fantasy was not limited to the publications of Blatchford, the Labour Church and the ILP, or to 'ethical socialism' -- a category which, incidentally, has been deconstructed in recent years. The other socialist groups, whether the Marxist Social Democratic Federation or the Fabian Society (home to the most famous socialist writer of children's fantasy in the period, Edith Nesbit), also resorted to fairy tale motifs. An extension of the discussion to them, as well as to the periodicals of the Folk-lore Society, which barely figure in the text, would have made Sumpter's case even stronger. These, however, are desiderata rather than flaws: the only real problem of the book is its poor editing. This concerns not only the numerous typos (e.g. the *Commonweal* was launched in 1885 not 1883), uncorrected grammar, and inconsistent citation style, but the expression of the argument itself. The writing is difficult to follow in places because the links between sentences, paragraphs, or ideas remain unclear. Evidence and quotations are presented haphazardly, without obvious systematic arrangement, and occasionally the narrative jumps disconnectedly without forming a coherent line of argument. This is more apparent at the micro level of the page or the section rather than in entire chapters, and is all the more regrettable as it impedes a fruitful close reading. The research that went into the making of *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale* is extensive and admirable, and if more care were taken with its presentation it could without reservation be called a first-rate contribution to the field.

Anna Vaninskaya
Cambridge Victorian Studies Group